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Approved For Release 2001/08/08 : CIA-RDP79T00865A001300050001-3

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STAFF NOTES:

**Middle East
Africa
South Asia**

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No. 0819/75
July 2, 1975

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Exempt from general declassification schedule
of E. O. 11652, exemption category:
§ 5B (1), (2), and (3)
Automatically declassified
on: Date Impossible to Determine

MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Egypt

Media Reacts to US-Israeli Friction

The current public friction between the US and Israel over Middle East peace negotiations is being treated with evident delight by Egypt's media. The widespread belief in Cairo that Washington is exerting heavy pressure on Israel for progress in negotiations has evoked differing ideas among media commentators on the speed with which the US should produce concrete results. In all cases, however, there appears to be a high degree of expectation that the US will indeed follow through, either with successful negotiations for an interim Sinai agreement or, failing that, with a declaration of Washington's ideas on the shape of a final settlement.

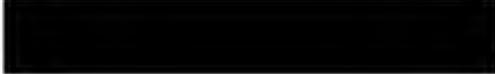
An *Al-Ahram* editorialist commented last week that, with US-Israeli differences now out in the open, the US can no longer delay the conclusion of its policy reassessment. Noting that the "mere threat of a firmer US stand toward Israel" will not persuade Israel to abandon its "obstinacy," the editorialist urged the US to take clear and decisive steps now.

Other commentators have adopted a somewhat more patient attitude and indicated a confident belief that the US will in fact take steps in the near future. *Jumhuriya's* diplomatic editor, who is well plugged in to the government, wrote recently that the US is now conducting the "last round of negotiations before it throws its full weight" behind a US-devised plan for a final settlement. Arguing that the US has become more "evenhanded," the editor cited several recent US statements to support her belief that, if Washington cannot produce another disengagement in the Sinai, it will, on the basis of its policy reassessment, maintain pressure on Israel for an overall settlement.

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With an attitude of almost equal certitude, a Cairo radio commentator recently declared his belief that the US is adhering to its statements rejecting stalemate in negotiations and is "in all probability" offering Israel the choice of negotiating an interim step or "facing an American confrontation in order to achieve a comprehensive solution." It is perhaps for this reason, the commentator speculated, that the US has not announced the outcome of its reassessment; it is awaiting the results of its current pressure on Israel. (CONFIDENTIAL NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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Egypt

Cairo Developing Closer Relations with Western Labor Organization

Contacts between Egypt and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) have both increased and become warmer of late, although there is no evidence that the Egyptian labor federation is considering affiliation or that the matter is even under discussion.

ICFTU's support for an Egyptian labor leader in his successful bid last month for a seat on the International Labor Organization's (ILO) governing body was the latest example of closer cooperation. The visit to Cairo late this month by ICFTU's Secretary General will provide another opportunity to improve the relationship.

The talks will take up a full agenda of international labor questions and will also include the request by the Israeli labor federation, Histadrut, for support of Israeli use of the Suez Canal. Another major topic will probably be the call by labor organizations in several third world countries and certain Christian trade unions for an "international development conference." The Egyptians reportedly support ICFTU's position that such a conference should take place only in an ILO framework.

Some observers add up these developments and come to the conclusion that Egypt is preparing the way for affiliation with ICFTU. ICFTU officials are quick to downplay such reports, and the Assistant Secretary General has noted that the Egyptians would "kill themselves politically" with the rest of the Arab world were they to seek membership in the foreseeable future. Despite such disclaimers, it seems likely that Cairo might be testing the waters for Arab reactions to the Secretary General's visit. In any event both sides may see the visit as an opportunity for a private exchange on the prospects for affiliation, however eventual. (CONFIDENTIAL)



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French Territory of Afars and Issas

The Arab Role

Ali Aref Bourhan, the president of the territorial council of the French Territory of Afars and Issas, says he will seek Arab guarantees against interference by Somalia and Ethiopia before asking France for independence. Aref fears the territory, which is claimed by both Somalia and Ethiopia, could become a battleground between his two neighbors if France withdraws. In a press interview on June 30, Aref said he would take the territory into the Arab League if Arab countries agreed to provide military and economic guarantees. The population of the territory is predominantly Muslim.

Aref, who owes his position to French backing, has been maneuvering to stay ahead of the increasing popular sentiment in favor of independence. He advocates eventual independence, but believes the territory needs careful preparation before cutting its ties with Paris. Aref probably realizes that securing Arab guarantees, if obtainable at all, would require considerable negotiations. In the meantime, he can point to his words as evidence of his desire for forward movement. He probably also hopes to reduce the pressure for swift independence coming from his domestic opponents by reminding them and the general population that ending French rule is no panacea and could lead to serious problems with Somalia and Ethiopia.

Aref may also be trying to outmaneuver the Arab countries and Mogadiscio. In April, the Arab League Council--prodded by Somali President Siad--passed a resolution urging independence for the territory. By linking independence to Arab guarantees, Aref probably sees a chance to drive a wedge between the Arabs and

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Somalia. In Siad's terms, "independence" means union with Somalia, not an independent country backed by the Arabs.

Ethiopia and other black African countries would oppose an Arab security guarantee of a country on the African continent. The Organization of African Unity, however, might offer a general political guarantee, provided it had the approval of Ethiopia and Somalia.
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